Formed as (Sexual) Peacemakers?

Interrogating the Role of Sexuality in Relation to Institutional Culture for Formation for Witness and Discipleship at Postsecondary Theological Schools

Kimberly Penner

Danielle is a queer Mennonite undergraduate student studying theology and living in residence at a Mennonite university. She is excited to live away from home for the first time. She is excited to make new friends and to date new people. The residence code of conduct assumes a gender binary (men and women) and states that men and women must live in separate residences (presumably to prevent premarital heterosexual sex). Sex is stated as being for marriage. Sex is not defined, and sexuality more broadly understood is not mentioned. Rather than enforce the residence rules, the approach of the Residence Assistants or "Dons" at Danielle's residence is "Don't ask, don't tell." Both approaches raise a lot of questions for Danielle. She wonders how faith and sexuality relate, if they relate, for her. Even though the university claims to celebrate diversity, she reads between the lines of the residence policy and feels like who she is as a sexual person is not openly celebrated. She wonders if there is another path besides what she gleans from the university residence rules and the lack of any clear ethic from the culture in her residence. Are there any possibilities for bringing together her faith and sexuality in life-giving, liberating ways? She wishes she had more support to figure out the answer to that question.

Nate enrolls in an academic program at a theological school to earn a degree that will educate and form him for congregational witness and service as a minister. He takes the required courses in theology, Bible, spiritual care, worship, and ethics. He learns about power and privilege, the importance of maintaining healthy sexual boundaries in ministry, and the importance of professional ethics more broadly. He does well. He gets good grades, and his peers appreciate him and his comments in class. Nate grew up steeped in purity culture.[1] As he

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reflects on his faith journey, he shares with his peers that this upbringing made him associate sexual desire and sexual acts before marriage as sinful and that this perpetuated a great deal of shame for him about his own sexual desires. He longs for a life-giving sexual ethic that affirms him as a sexual person, especially as he continues to struggle with feelings of shame, self-loathing, and sexual fantasies involving violence. He keeps these struggles to himself, feeling too sinful to talk about them with others. Nate graduates from the program and goes on to become a pastor. Years later, news comes out that he has sexually assaulted a youth in the congregation. As faculty and students meet to process this news, they wonder what more could be done to prevent this from happening in the future.

These stories raise questions about how and where formation happens on the campuses of theological schools, institutional responsibility to form students who do no harm, and the relationship between sexuality and faith formation for students. I claim that the contextual nature of theological education is sexually situated and, therefore, that sexuality matters for formation for witness and discipleship.[2] If Anabaptist-Mennonite postsecondary institutions—particularly their theological programs—seek to form students for witness and discipleship that embodies the values of peace and justice, then we as people in these institutions must pay attention to our religious narratives and institutional culture[3] around sexuality; we must identify elements that produce discriminatory and abusive outcomes and promote those that are liberating and life-giving.

I begin with the contextual and political nature of theological education. Engaging the work of Willie James Jennings in *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*, I agree that theological formation is shaped by its Western, patriarchal, colonial history. I elaborate that this history is also a history of sexuality—for example, of theological and ethical understandings of sexuality, of sexualized and racialized others, and of sexuality as a patriarchal and colonial tool to control subjugated peoples. I then draw on Sarah Ahmed's work to fur-

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1 Purity culture in evangelicalism promotes abstinence, heterosexuality, and an understanding of gender as a binary (male and female), with men needing to be the strong leaders of the household and women needing to be supportive mothers and wives. Purity culture "is centered on the belief that girls' and women's social 'value' is contingent on their virginity/chastity and their ability to remain sexually 'pure.' Rooted in patriarchal gender ideals, it fetishizes virginity" (Caroline Blyth, *Rape Culture, Purity Culture, and Coercive Control in Teen Girl Bibles* [London, Routledge, 2021], 10).

2 I also believe the same is true for Western education more broadly, but for the sake of this article I will limit myself to arguments about theological education.

3 When I speak of institutional culture in this paper, I am including normative actions, signs, symbols, categories, and knowledge through which a community performs its identity and is, therefore, defined.

ther reveal how this history continues to negatively shape experiences in the academy today via cultures of sexual abuse and harassment. Ahmed's work also illustrates the importance of looking to complaints about abuses of power as important sources for institutional ethics. To make the connection to formation, I demonstrate how institutional culture, not only course content and pedagogy, is influential for student formation for sexual peace and justice, citing research by Marilyn Naidoo. Finally, I offer suggestions for how to form students for witness and discipleship as sexual beings committed to peace and justice.

Formation is Sexually Situated

Anabaptist-Mennonite postsecondary institutions do not guarantee formation, nor do they license students for ministry. Yet formation, most often cited as formation for ministry, remains a common goal: formation for "service to church and society" as someone who "engage[s] issues of justice and peace and attend[s] to voices of the marginalized,"[4] formation for "service to others, peacemaking, cross-cultural engagement and sustainability,"[5] faith formation for "the good of the mission and health of the church."[6] Somehow, theological education and life at a theological school is not only about learning new information and academic skills but also, ideally, about forming students to live out the values of the institution, informed by the values of the gospel. Theological formation is about the "ongoing development of identity, reclaiming one's culture, gender and other aspects of identity; it is part of moving towards greater authenticity."[7]

As a sessional instructor who teaches Christian ethics at a Mennonite institution, I am filled with excitement and hope at the possibility of mutual formation for peace and justice. It gives added meaning and purpose to the work we do in the classroom and the kind of positive impact we can have on the church and society. Willie James Jennings, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Africana Studies at Yale Divinity School and former Dean of Academic Programs at Duke University Divinity School, says it well when he writes:

> Education and theological education kill the lie that people don't change. Formation happens, people do change, even if that change is not easily perceived by impatient eyes. I have seen many kinds of formation, many befores

4 "Theological Studies," Conrad Grebel University College, accessed February 27, 2022, https://uwaterloo.ca/theological-studies/about#mission.

5 "About EMU," Eastern Mennonite University, accessed February 27, 2022, https://emu.edu/about/.

6 "Graduate School of Theology and Ministry," Canadian Mennonite University, accessed February 27, 2022, https://www.cmu.ca/academics/gstm.

7 Marilyn Naidoo, "An Ethnographic Study on Managing Diversity in Two Protestant Theological Colleges," *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016): 1–7, 2.

> and many afters, among undergraduates, graduate students, and doctoral students. Even newly minted scholars becoming new faculty members and moving from the early years of teaching to the mature years to the senior season participate in a formation process.[8]

The possibility of formation for witness and discipleship that is committed to peace and justice as we learn and grow together is exciting. That said, and as Jennings argues, the formation that takes place in theological education, and Western education in general, is also troubled and distorted.[9]

I agree with Jennings that as much as formation can reflect change and character development for the better, we also need to wrestle with the fact that theological education has been and continues to be a distorted formation. Jennings spends much of *After Whiteness* explaining this distortion—a formation of the student into the image of a "white self-sufficient man, his self-sufficiency defined by possession, control, and mastery"[10] and its connection to the crisis of decline in theological education. In short, he claims it is formed between two things: "a pedagogical imagination calibrated to forming white self-sufficient men and a related pedagogical imagination calibrated to forming a Christian racial and cultural homogeneity that yet performs the nationalist vision of that same white self-sufficient man."[11] While this is a problem that affects all of Western education, Jennings argues that it was born of theological education itself.[12]

In the history of Christianity and its missions, the spread of the gospel goes hand in hand with colonialism. For, as Jennings states, while translation of the gospel opened endless possibilities of boundary-crossing freedom and life, it also opened the possibilities of boundary-crossing slavery and death.[13] The teacher and the translator have the power to "call worlds into existence through words spoken and written."[14] Sadly, teachers and translators often called into existence worlds of domination and subordination, of the White savior and the sinful, dark-skinned Other in need of saving, who was also to be exploited, conquered, and enslaved.[15]

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8 Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2020), x.

9 Jennings, x.

10 Jennings, xi.

11 Jennings, xi,

12 Jennings, xi

13 Jennings, xii.

14 Jennings, xii.

15 See Kelly Brown Douglas's work on the racial and sexual stereotypes of Black people by White culture and White Christianity as a tool of both slavery and Christian

This history still reveals itself in theological education and continues to negatively impact students today. As I look back at my own experience as a doctoral student at a consortium of theological schools, I now recognize the ways in which I too was being formed into the image of the White, self-sufficient male. Even though I was critical of this image as a feminist theo-ethicist, I felt the anxiety of needing to conform to it to succeed. I was trying to publish more and be smarter by knowing more, to dispense that same knowledge to others and prop myself up. I felt the temptation to view my classmates as competition. To an extent, which I was largely unconscious of, I adopted the myth of meritocracy (that I would get what I wanted by simply working harder and that I would deserve whatever I accomplished, more so than others who did not achieve what I did).

Self-sufficiency was implicitly understood, and sometimes explicitly stated, as the goal of our education. At the same time that I claimed I valued my physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being as a student, I also sacrificed my health and well-being to keep up academically. Even with a doctoral supervisor who promoted and embodied feminist values—who emphasized collaboration over competition, offered affirmations alongside critique, bought me lunch and tried to incorporate yoga breaks into our class time—the distorted goal of formation remained powerful. There was enough of the distorted image of the self-sufficient White male in my coursework, perpetuated by some of my male classmates and promoted by the history and hierarchy of academia, that I found myself feeling depressed and anxious about succeeding. It was especially overwhelming as a pregnant woman having a child during my PhD studies and not wanting to fall behind, not to mention the need to find part-time employment to help support myself and my partner financially. Ultimately, I was still dependent on conforming to academy to succeed as an academic, which meant becoming some version of the self-sufficient White male.

The history of theological education in the West is also a history of sexuality. Although Jennings spends less time on this in *After Whiteness*, it relates to his argument since gender-based and sexualized violence are tools of racism and colonialism, including for some Christian missions. Indian Residential Schools in Canada and American Indian boarding schools are primary examples. The rates of sexual violence in Indian Residential Schools in Canada, many of which were run by churches, were astronomical, perhaps as high as 75 percent in some schools.[16] Sexual violence was used as a tool to subdue and conquer. It is a history of power as domination. This sexual violence also tells a story about sexual

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missions (Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999]).

16 Joanna Rice, "Indian Residential School Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine* (March, 2011), accessed February 27,

desires and fantasies, of sexual ethics and theologies that either enabled such violence or were completely ignored with little to no accountability. It is a history about power and sexuality.[17] Again, these histories of inequality and these discourses[18] about sexuality are part of the situatedness of theological education and, as Jennings reminds us, need to be named and actively resisted today.

Similar Christian discourses on sexuality (i.e., those steeped in top-down power and theological understandings of some people and bodies as more sexual and sinful than others) continue to this day and add to the distorted formation of students for witness and discipleship. Examples include anti-LGBTQ+ arguments and policies; the continued sexualization of women's bodies, Black women's bodies, and indigenous women's bodies, whose sexuality was understood as sinful; complementarian views of gender as binary (male and female); arguments promoting sexual purity, including (especially) women's virginity; and "abstinence-only" policies and arguments.

Each of these needs to be unpacked in detail. Given the constraints of this paper, it will suffice to say that what they all have in common is that they contribute to feelings of shame, which increases the likelihood for low self-esteem and abuse. When sexual and gender minorities are denied their humanity and belovedness, they experience deep shame for being themselves. That shame can make them vulnerable to abuse as sexual predators seek out those who are vulnerable.[19] For those who are not minorities, or those who have greater social

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2022, https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/indian-residential-school-truth-and-reconciliation.

17 In the colonial imagination, indigenous bodies are also associated with sexual sin. As Robert Warrior explains, indigenous peoples were often likened to the biblical Canaanites by Christian colonizers—worthy of mass destruction because of sexual sin. In the Bible, the Canaanites commit acts of sexual violence in Sodom (Gen 19:1–29) and prostituted themselves before their gods (Gen 28:21–22, Deut 28:18, 1 Kings 14:24). In the eyes of the colonizers, indigenous peoples were considered sexually perverse. They associated indigenous nakedness with sin, lust, and shame and considered their bodies dirty and sexually violable—"rapable." Sexual violence is part of the colonial legacy of Christian missions (Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* [Durham: Duke, 2015], 10).

18 The notion of "discourse" comes from history, historiography, and cultural studies in the work of philosopher Michel Foucault. It includes "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern" (Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell,1987], 108).

19 Hilary Jerome Scarsella and Stephanie Krehbiel, "Sexual Violence: Christian Theological Legacies and Responsibilities," *Religion Compass* 13, (Sept 2019): 1–13, 4.

privilege—such as heterosexual white men—feelings of sexual shame for simply being human or for having experienced sexual abuse themselves, can contribute to a lack of self-awareness and other-awareness that can increase their risk for committing sexual abuse.[20]

These discourses that produce sexual shame illustrate how theology can participate in systems of sexual violence.[21] Reiterating this point and making the connection to Christianity's historical legacy of distorted formation, Hilary Jerome Scarsella and Stephanie Krehbiel, feminist scholars and advocates for survivors of sexual violence, state:

> Sexual violence is perpetrated disproportionately against those whose perceived worth is historically precarious: women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, people who are incarcerated, detained, undocumented, or without a home. The precarity that attends these social locations can be traced, in part, to Christianity's clear history of associating sin with particular kinds of bodies: women's bodies, black and brown bodies, LGBTQIA+ bodies, disabled bodies, criminalized bodies.[22]

The distorted formation that takes place within theological education has been and continues to be situated within Christian attitudes and discourses related to sexuality as it intersects also with narratives related to race, class, ability, etcetera. Therefore, a commitment at theological schools to formation for witness and discipleship that is peace- and justice-focused will need to examine these discourses and promote a moral vision of nonviolent and life-giving (intersectional) sexuality for all.

As a feminist scholar, I begin this work of naming and resisting unhealthy views of sexuality by listening to those who have been harmed by them. Along with feminist scholar Sarah Ahmed, I find that complaints of abuses of power are an excellent place to hear these voices. In *Complaint!*, to better reveal how institutions use power to stop these complaints from being brought forward and/or to ignore them when they are, Ahmed listens with a feminist ear to those who have experienced sexual harassment in postsecondary education.

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20 There are many reasons why people sexually offend. From a survey of the research, and from what is known about sexual offenders, W. L. Marshall, D. Anderson, and F. Champaigne propose that self-esteem plays a role in the reasons for sexual offending—specifically, that low self-esteem may contribute to this behavior ("Self-esteem and Its Relationship to Sexual Offending," *Psychology, Crime & Law* 3, no. 3 (1997): 161–86). Therefore, religious stories and teachings about sexuality that produce feelings of shame, which lower self-esteem, are part of the problem.

21 Hilary Jerome Scarsella, "Victimization via Ritualization: Christian Communion and Sexual Abuse," *Trauma and Lived Religion: Transcending the Ordinary*, eds. R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Srdjan Sremac et al. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 225–52.

22 Scarsella and Krehbiel, "Sexual Violence," 4.

Only some people are considered "complainers," Ahmed reminds us. "Don't complain!" we are taught regularly as children. To be called a complainer is a bad thing, and "to be heard as complaining is not to be heard."[23] People are dismissed as "complainers" since complaining is to be stuck on being negative.

To find where distorted views of sexuality, race, and gender continue in theological education today, listen to complaints about related abuses of power, because, as Ahmed states, "To cover up a complaint is to cover over what the complaint was about." In Ahmed's research, these complaints were about the "sexist and ableist bullying, the 'sexism that is rampant' within universities."[24]

But how is all this related to the formation of students for witness and discipleship? To answer this question, I turn to ethnographic researcher and practical theologian, Marilyn Naidoo. What Naidoo makes explicit, that could only be gleaned from Jennings and Ahmed, is that institutional culture plays a significant role in theological formation, or formation for witness and discipleship. For this reason, paying attention to institutional culture as well as what is taught in the classroom is important if we are invested in formation for witness and service to the church and society. Culture, she explains, "refers to processors, categories and knowledge through which a community is defined (Donald & Rattansi 1992). Students are formed by [an] institution's culture as they interact with it and with others in the learning context, which functions as a plausibility structure for nurturing and sustaining the culture's shared meanings and symbols (Geertz 1973)."[25]

The continuing legacy of inequality and unjust power dynamics regarding race in South Africa, as well as little being known about how theological institutions handle diversity and the implications for student formation, prompted Naidoo's research.[26] Her aims were to better understand how future ministers are being prepared to handle issues of diversity and to assess the critical role of the theological institution's culture in relation to student formation on the topic of diversity (i.e., issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation, which have an interlocking nature).[27]

To accomplish these aims, she conducted a two-year ethnographic study of two private Protestant theological institutions in South Africa (spending equal time at each) gaining information through student interviews, focus groups, and staff interviews. Naidoo also gained knowledge of students' experiences by "attending classes, visiting student residences, going to chapel services, attending recreational activities, taking meals with students on and off campus, even

23 Sarah Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Durham: Duke, 2021), 1.

24 Ahmed, 10.

25 Naidoo, "An Ethnographic Study," 2.

26 Naidoo, 1.

27 Naidoo, 1

attending a graduation ceremony." Her goal was to "let the formative process unfold and watch students and staff as they experienced and negotiated their institution's culture."[28]

Naidoo's findings are significant. Both institutions named "diversity" as important, but both failed to link diversity positively to ministerial identity formation in a way that would make a significant difference to how students felt about it. In other words, the institutions promoted diversity in policy but not practice, and this negatively impacted student formation for diversity and equality in ministry. The institutional culture of the Protestant Independent tradition (Institution A), was described as having a "disengaged stance towards diversity issues" with a "colour-blind theology . . . perpetuating surface [level] change."[29] The Protestant Mainline tradition (Institution B) culture included an awareness of diversity as administrators and faculty saw themselves as agents in the transformation of society; however, theirs was a "taken-for-granted" stance—"leaving no reason to discuss that diversity and whether or not it translated into student integration." "The assumption was made," Naidoo explains, that "living in community was sufficient to help students 'rub against' each other. However, formation does not happen by osmosis but is built in community through the integration of personal and community formation (Tatum 1997)."[30]

Naidoo's research suggests that because neither institution lived out its commitment to diversity via institutional culture and community, diversity was not adopted in a meaningful way by students in their ministerial identity formation. While students in both institutions were committed to racial justice and understanding how diverse perspectives could enrich an understanding of the Christian life, "there was generally a culture of silence, as students were afraid to speak because of the fear of being victimised and jeopardising their chances of ordination."[31]

In a more recent article on the significance of institutional culture for student formation, Naidoo reiterates that "the relationship between the faculty, staff and students communicates potent messages about the nature of leadership and community."[32] Through their interactions with and observations of various relationships within the institution, "students rapidly come to understand power relationships within the theological community and subconsciously take

28 Naidoo, 3.

29 Naidoo, 1.

30 Naidoo, 8.

31 Naidoo, 10.

32 Marilyn Naidoo, "Challenging the Status Quo of an Institutional Culture in Theological Training," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3, no. 2 (2017): 493–546, 539.

that model into their work."[33] Looking back at her ethnographic research, in Institution A, for example, where there was an official stance of non-racism, non-sexism, and equal treatment of all, administrators and educators spoke as though these inequalities no longer existed, as did most of the White students. However, in her interviews with Black African students at the same institution, "the topic of race on campus was never far from the surface" but remained difficult to talk about and to change. One student shared, referring to the student population, "I think in everyone's mind there is something about the colour of your skin. We think about this but we cannot speak about it."[34] A culture of "colour-blindness" caused some students to remain unaware of their ongoing White privilege, and caused others to remain silent rather than stand out and be considered a "complainer."[35] Naidoo illustrates some of the ways in which learning is "socially constructed in a reflective practicing community."[36]

Naidoo's findings also reveal that theological institutions form institutional cultures that are more "intense" than those of most other higher education institutions because their cultural script includes intellectual, social, and religious worlds that shape beliefs and practices in the life of the institution.[37] In Institution A, Naidoo found that scriptural resources influenced and shaped student views on diversity through a kind of uncritical biblical literalism and an emphasis on the individual's relationship with God, for example. So, while diversity was technically promoted in institutional policy, social systemic relationships of power remained unexamined in conversation with the Bible and theology. This half-hearted approach did not empower or teach students the skills to name and deconstruct ongoing racism and sexism in regard to their faith, nor to construct a liberating vision of equality that celebrates diversity and is supported by their faith.[38]

Naidoo's findings illustrate the profound connection between institutional culture and faith formation and offer suggestions for how to strengthen formation for ministry that celebrates diversity and equality in practice. If "institutional culture is one of the most salient forces operating within colleges and universities,"[39] then it ought to be carefully considered and taken seriously in theological schools. I agree with her that "within theological education we need to dismantle beliefs and practices that shape and sustain social injustice

33 Naidoo, 539–40.

34 Naidoo, "An Ethnographic Study," 4.

35 Naidoo, 2.

36 Naidoo, "Challenging the Status Quo," 539.

37 Naidoo, 532.

38 Naidoo, "An Ethnographic Study," 5.

39 Naidoo, "Challenging the Status Quo," 531.

and that [this] will require some institution[al] cultures to be challenged and changed."[40] With her, I see the importance of "being aware of the formative nature of the institutional culture" as that which "provides critical insights into an institution's change process and can help theological students and educators to find a common theological discourse."[41] When our theological schools do not embody cultures of sexual peace—when silence and secrecy are modeled over transparency regarding complaints of sexual abuse, when a culture of shame exists around sexual and gender diversity and women's pleasure—the burden to form students to be healthy sexual beings in relation to self and others falls to other influential sources in their lives (e.g., family, friends, secular society). Theological schools have a unique and impactful opportunity to form students for sexual peacemaking and peacemaking as sexual persons, but if they fail to do so, they risk doing harm.

Sexing Our Cultures of Peace: Sexual Education and Faith Formation for Peace and Justice

Rather than form students into versions of the "independent white man who seeks control through the accumulation of knowledge and possession," Jennings imagines theological education as formation into a community of belonging. He writes:

> Theological education is supposed to open up sites where we enter the struggle to rethink our people. We think them again, but now with others who must rethink their people. And in this thinking together we begin to see what we had not seen before: we belong to each other, we belong together. Belonging must become the hermeneutic starting point from which we think the social, the political, the individual, the ecclesial, and the most crucial for this work, the educational. Western education (and theological education) as it now exists works against a pedagogy of belonging.[42]

I value Jennings's vision of theological education and want to emphasize its relevance as a vision for all relationships within the institution. Openness to ongoing formation for peace and justice is something that could and should be modeled by all people within the institution in their various roles and relationships to create an institutional culture of belonging—a community of belonging with appreciation for each person and the role they play, including as sexual people. As Jennings argues, whereas Whiteness performed is a "refusal to envision shared facilitation, a refusal to place oneself in the journey of others, a

40 Naidoo, 531.

41 Naidoo, 531.

42 Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 15.

refusal of the vulnerability of a centeredness from below (rather than from the towering heights of whiteness),"[43] a commitment to belonging values formation as still open and teaches a vision of mission and witness that is also open to being formed in relationship/community. Imagine if this were the case regarding sexual identity and faith formation—if cultures of openness and belonging related to sexuality were practiced. What might this look like or include?

I agree with feminist Christian ethicist Kate Ott that we need more conversations about healthy sexuality, including healthy sexuality for professional ethics in ministry, for student formation. Healthy and liberating sexual ethics and understandings of sexuality go beyond "what not to do" as sexual persons. And yes, this is something that needs to be taught and embodied in community life and culture as well as in the classroom. How can this be embodied? This can happen through, for example, transparency as opposed to secrecy; sex-positivity and an emphasis on the importance of mutual pleasure in sexual relationships; an understanding of sexuality not as some separate part of us but always shaping who we are and how we relate to one another as embodied persons; and so on. Whether in the classroom or the institutional culture at large, resisting narratives that perpetuate sexual shame is crucial to promoting healthy sexuality and self-awareness as well as for preventing abuse, and these are some ways we can do that.

I would also suggest that an institution committed to forming sexual people of peace will better prepare students for ministry by offering them a course in professional sexual ethics. Beyond boundaries, Ott offers a theological reflection on sexuality and sexual health underpinned by scripture and tradition for sexual ethics for people going into ordained ministry.[44] Her ethic is informed by biblical understandings of creation, incarnation, and the love commandment that affirm our created goodness as sexual people and the importance of us being self- and other-regarding people in our sexuality. Her work is a valuable resource.

Conclusion

Jennings's contributions are essential for Anabaptist-Mennonite theological schools and their administrators and faculty if we seek to form students for ministry and witness who are committed to peace and justice. As Jennings reiterates, theological formation is contextual and informed by existing histories and relationships of unequal power, as are the contexts for ministry. If the colonial

43 Jennings, 101.

44 Kate Ott, "Sexuality, Health, and Integrity," *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach*, eds. Patricia Beattie Jung and Darryl W. Stephens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 14.

nature of Western education is not named, then its values—including possession, control, mastery, and self-sufficiency—will continue to be performed and promoted within our theological schools and, in turn, shape the churches and witness work that our students participate in. This competitive, controlling, individualistic mindset is antithetical to the good news understood as God's love for all of us, and to the work of giving and receiving this good news through Christian witness. As I have argued, this is especially true with regard to sexuality, as well as the intersections between sexuality and other social locations (e.g., race, gender).

Our postsecondary institutions are historically located and cannot escape the current power inequalities within the academy, church, and society today. However, I have faith and hope that we can nevertheless do more to resist such inequalities by conscientizing ourselves to these harmful narratives and by listening to those who voice complaints. This will enable us to better embody cultures of peace and justice as sexual people and form one another for witness and discipleship in service for the church and society.